

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

QUESTION # 124.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #124. *Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?*

A. By *father and mother*, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents,¹ but all superiors in age² and gifts;³ and especially such as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family,⁴ church,⁵ or commonwealth.⁶

Question 1—*What is meant by the term natural parents?*

Answer—“Natural parents” refer to those who occupy organic connection with their offspring being, by nature, the paired mothers and fathers from whom there is descent, Gen. 5:3, 4. The term “parent” refers to the caregiving, or nourishing, that is conveyed from the previous to subsequent generations, 2 Cor. 12:14. This caregiving should include spiritual nurture, Deut. 6:7. The term translated “parents” (γονεῖς), in the New Testament, John 9:2; derives from the word (γίνομαι) which connotes to have a beginning, John 8:58. Natural parents, then, refer to those from whom a person has his beginning, Prov. 23:22, 25. This relation is extended to the parents of parents, Ruth 4:13, 16, 17. It is to those who occupy this room that the command pertains, Eph. 6:1, 2.

Question 2—*Are these terms father and mother restricted to natural parents?*

Answer—No. All superiors, besides natural parents, are to be accounted parents whose authority and government we ought to respect, Rom. 13:7; including:

1.) Those who are superiors in age, 1 Tim. 5:1, 2. An appeal to age, when used in conjunction with godly counsel, ought to go far in the carrying of moral suasion, Philem. 9, 10. Age carries with it the presumption of superiority over youth, which ought to instill a sense of humility, 1 Pet. 5:5.

2.) Those are superiors who exceed us in gifts, such as the inventors of the arts that have been very useful to the world, Gen. 4:20-22. Likewise, those who, exercising great providence and organization over a people, through the establishing of cities and nations are accounted fathers, or superiors, 1 Chron. 2:50-52; 4:4, 5.

3.) Those to whom we owe, under God, our outward prosperity and happiness, sustaining us in our temporal concerns are our superiors and, therefore, as parents, Gen. 45:8.

4.) Those who exceed us in grace are also to be accounted as parents, Luke 16:24, 30. As well do they exceed in grace who, though not natural parents, are spiritual parents, who beget us unto the faith, 1 Cor. 4:15.

¹ Prov. 23:22,25; Eph. 6:1, 2.

² 1 Tim. 5:1, 2.

³ Gen. 4:20-22; 45:8.

⁴ 2 Kings 5:13.

⁵ 2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; Gal. 4:19.

⁶ Isa. 49:23.

Question 3—*Who especially are meant by the terms father and mother in this commandment?*

Answer—Those are meant who encompass in their persons some excellence or exemplar of their peculiar species, Matt. 3:9; John 8:44. Especially when they are, by God's ordinance, over us in authority:

1.) Whether they are over others in families, as husbands, 2 Sam. 12:3; or, masters, Mal. 1:6. Princes, great men, and heads of families, are called *fathers*, Gen. 20:2; John 8:53. Thus, Naaman was denominated by his servants, 2 Kings 5:13.

2.) Men of honor and usefulness in the church, as ministers and church officers, are called by these terms, as we see with Elisha and Elijah, 2 Kings 2:12. So, too, Joash, though the king of Israel, was constrained to acknowledge the excellence and worth of Elisha using the same expression, 2 Kings 13:14. The same use is implied in the apostle's styling those whom he had been of use to, for their conviction, and enlightening in the doctrines of the gospel, Gal. 4:9.

3.) Good kings and governors, magistrates, supreme and subordinate, are so called, Isa. 49:23.

Question 4—*Why are the words "by God's ordinance" added?*

Answer—These words, "by God's ordinance," recall several things:

First, we are reminded that these *relations* are not simply artificial constructs devised by the will of man, whereby one class of men gains ascendancy over another, *cf.* Matt. 20:25. The existence of degrees of relation comes from the hand of God, 1 Cor. 4:7.

Second, although these relations be natural and organic, yet the both the *power*, Ps. 65:11; and the *authority* whereby superiors have ascendancy over inferiors, is also from God, Rom. 13:1. For this reason, whether by providence or precept, these relations derive from the Lord, Dan. 2:21.

Third, the fact that they are "by God's ordinance" implies both the limitations of the exercise of power and authority as superiors over inferiors, Acts 5:29; as well as prescribing the proper and ordained uses of these relations, 1 Tim. 1:8; 3:5; 2 Tim. 2:21.